



Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Domenique Thornton; I work for the Mental Health Association of CT, Inc., and we are a member of CT Association of Nonprofits. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to oppose H.B. 6596 An Act Concerning Notification Requirements for Halfway Houses. As part of my duties for MHAC, I serve as the privacy officer. Persons with mental health disabilities have special rights of privacy under the Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act (HIPAA) because they are receiving treatment for their mental health disabilities. Persons with disabilities have rights to receive treatment under the protections of confidentiality. It would be a violation of confidentiality for anyone who works for the MHAC to disclose the identity of our members or where they receive services. I believe that this proposed bill would breach HIPAA and the code of confidentiality by making public the information of where our clients are receiving services. People deserve to receive therapeutic care without the potential harassment or public humiliation of being on a public registry. They also deserve to be treated in a like manner as everyone else.

The Mental Health Association has had a one hundred year history of fighting the stigma associated with mental illness. I could not imagine a more invasive way to create even more stigma than to require that their homes be publicly registered. What rational purpose would be served for such invasion of privacy? Every American has the right to privacy. Whatever our walk of life, we should have the choice to reside in peace and quiet enjoyment. Would we require minority groups to notify the municipality where they are planning to reside and then be disclosed in a public registry? What about older persons or persons born in foreign countries? Why would the state create a non-special needs population notice and reporting requirement? People with special needs should not be treated differently than anyone else. It would not happen for other groups because of a public outcry. H.B. 6596 should not be approved because I believe it is unlawful to treat people who have mental health disabilities in a discriminatory manner. Under the Federal Fair Housing Act, people with disabilities have an equal opportunity to live where they want, and not to be subjected to rules and requirements that are different from those applied to people without disabilities. If the current use in a particular zone is for mixed residential, then it should be mixed residential for everyone. Currently, federal and Connecticut state laws rightly protect people with disabilities from discrimination in housing. Connecticut should continue to do so.